DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 396 176 CE 071 958

AUTHOR O'Neill, Joseph P.; Grandy, Jerilee
TITLE The Image of Ministry: Attitudes of Young Adults toward Organized Religion and Religious Professions. Ministry Research Notes. An ETS Occasional Report.
INSTITUTION Educational Testing Service, Princeton, N.J.
SPONS AGENCY Lilly Endowment, Inc., Indianapolis, Ind.
PUB DATE 94
NOTE 21p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attitudes; *Career Choice; Catholics; *Church Related Colleges; *Clergy; College Students; Comparative Analysis; Demography; Essays; Higher Education; High School Students; Jews; Protestants; *Religion; School Attitudes; Secondary Education; *Theological Education; Vocational Interests; *Young Adults

ABSTRACT

The attitudes of entering seminarians and high school and college students toward organized religion and religious professions were examined to determine why people enter the ministry. Various published sources, including a survey of 4,968 beginning seminarians that was conducted by the Educational Testing Service in fall 1992 and 1993 and a fact book on theological education published by the Association of Theological Schools, served as the data for a comparative analysis of the traditional images of the clergy in the Protestant, Jewish, and Catholic traditions and the images of the clergy currently held by young adults. It was concluded that the future pool of ministry candidates is likely to grow somewhat over the new few years and contain a larger number of men under age 30 than it has in the past 2 decades. The number of women under age 30 who are likely to consider a religious profession was not predicted to increase, however. The future supply of clergy was determined to be both a doctrinal and a demographic issue. Some cognitive dissonance between young adults' image of ministry and the traditional clergy roles was discovered. (Eleven tables/figures are included. Contains 25 references.) (MN)

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ED 396 176

Ministry Research Notes *An ETS Occasional Report* *Summer 1994*

The Image of Ministry: Attitudes of Young Adults Toward Organized Religion and Religious Professions

Joseph P. O'Neill • Jerilee Grandy

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Ministry Research Notes is a series of occasional papers published by Educational Testing Service, Princeton, NJ 08541-9001.

Editor: Joseph P. O'Neill

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Research for this report was funded by a grant from the Lilly Endowment.

Highlights

- High school students who participate in religious activities and organizations have significantly higher verbal and quantitative scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) than students who do not participate in such activities.
- The Roman Catholic Church has 10,000 fewer priests and 80,000 fewer nuns today than it had in 1967. It is also the only mainline denomination in which young women are less interested in religious professions than young men.
- The number of applications to Reform and Conservative Jewish seminaries in some recent years has doubled from the average levels during the 1970s. However, these seminaries remain highly selective, turning down from a third to a half of those who apply.
- In most mainline Protestant denominations and in the Jewish Reform and Conservative movements, women make up almost half of seminary entering classes, and a third of them are over 40 when they begin their studies. In contrast, only a fifth of entering male seminarians are in the same age bracket.
- In Protestant seminaries, women in their first year of ordination-track Master of Divinity programs are significantly less likely than their male counterparts to say they intend to be ordained.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the 19th century and well into the latter half of the 20th, the typical American seminarian — Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish — was white, male, and just out of college. This profile did not begin to change until the late 1960s with the entrance of an increasingly large number of women, many of them in their 30s and 40s. Today, in most mainline Protestant denominations and in the Jewish Reform and Conservative movements, women make up almost half of seminary entering classes, and a third of them are over 40 when they begin their studies. In contrast, only a fifth of entering male seminarians are in the same age bracket[1].

These age and gender changes are not peculiar to those entering religious professions. Over the past generation an increasing proportion of women have been entering the secular professions, as well. And young Americans, both women and men, have been making life choices somewhat later than they once did. The median age of men entering their first marriage, for example, rose from 22.8 years of age in 1950 to 26.1 in 1990. Finishing college in four years is no longer the norm, and delayed entrance and "stopping-out" are now a common part of college baccalaureate programs. However, when students postpone their entrance into a profession or occupation for a period of public service or the Peace Corps, their collective decision-making has a profound effect on labor markets. As a rule of thumb, the older an individual is when taking up an occupation, the shorter his or her working life. The shorter the working life, the higher the average cost of educating a stable supply of working professionals.

For denominations to maintain a stable supply of clergy, a 10-year decrease in the average working life of a priest, minister, or rabbi from 40 years to 30 means that the rate of recruitment and the level of educational subsidies must increase by a quarter. Currently no such increase is in evidence. The number of students preparing for ordination in the 200 plus seminaries of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) peaked in 1984 at 28,880 and has been steady to declining each year since then[2]. For some churches the drop in the number of candidates for ordination has been precipitous. A recent demographic study of Roman Catholic priests concluded:

> The Roman Catholic church faces a staggering loss of diocesan priests in the United States as it moves into the 21st century. There is little chance of reversing this trend in the lifetime of the current generation of church-goers. . . By the year 2005 there could be 2,200 parishioners for each priest in contrast with 1,100 per priest in 1966. (Schoenherr and Young 1993: xvii)

The American Catholic Church, which requires celibacy of its clergy and does not ordain women, has only half as many seminarians preparing for ordination today as it did 30 years ago. Even in denominations where celibacy or the ordination of women are not at issue, the number of candidates for ordination and their age and gender mix has become a matter of concern. In the Episcopal Church, for example, 1993 marked the first time in 18 years that the number of candidates taking the General Ordination Examinations fell below 250. Over the past 15 years, the enrollment of male Master of Divinity candidates in United Methodist seminaries, as figure 1 shows, dropped by almost a third from 2,167 in 1976 to 1,481 in 1991. And the seminaries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America enrolled 25 percent fewer men in their Master of Divinity programs at the end of this decade than they did at its beginning.

For many denominations, the falling number of candidates for ordination coincides with the expected retirement of the large classes ordained immediately after World War II. Both the United Methodist Church and the Disciples of Christ, for example, estimate that roughly 42 percent of their clergy will retire by the end of the century[3]. But at issue is not only the number of clergy but their age distribution. Young suburban congregations prefer to be served by younger clergy and older congregations by those of a more mature age. Yet some denominations find that the

[1] Survey of 4968 entering American seminarians by Educational Testing Service, Fall 1992 and 1993.

[2] Association of Theological Schools, *Fact Book on Theological Education*, Academic Year 1984-85 through 1992-93.

[3] Information supplied by the two denominations in grant proposals to the Lilly Endowment.

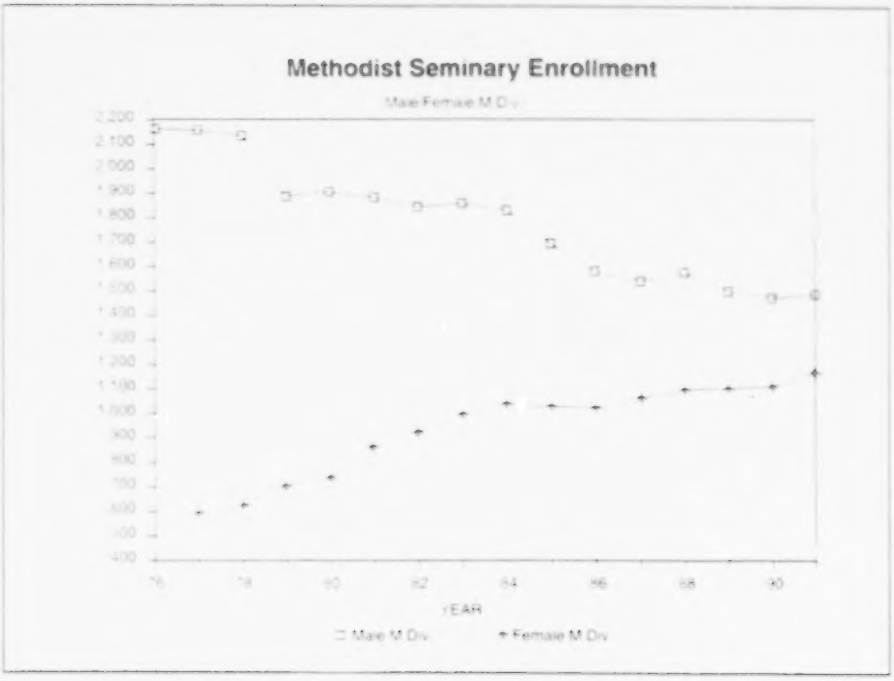

Figure 1 Source: Division of Ministry, United Methodist Church

age distribution of their clergy is skewed toward an older age profile. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), for example, has almost 10 times as many clergy in the 40-44 age cohort as in ages 25-29; and almost twice as many clergy in the 35-39 age bracket as there are between ages 30-34[4]. As a result, many denominations have initiated programs to interest high school and college students in the possibility of a religious calling.

In this essay we plan to explore the attitudes of entering seminarians and high school and college students toward organized religion and religious professions for the insight they may give us about why people enter the ministry. We will examine the traditional image of the clergy in each of the major religious traditions — Protestant, Jewish, and Catholic, in that order — and compare it with the images of the clergy that are currently held by young adult Americans.

We have found that, even when entrance into an occupation is postponed, the last years of high school and the early years of college continue to be an important time for making lasting career decisions. For example, almost two-thirds of the men and almost half the women first-year seminarians we surveyed in 1992 and 1993 said they had first considered a religious profession in their high school or college years. Insights into the thinking of both entering seminarians and high school and college students may have some relevance for the future supply of clergy in mainline denominations.

[4]Information supplied by the denomination in a grant proposal to the Lilly Endowment.

PROTESTANT STUDENT IMAGES OF THE CLERGY

Recent surveys of entering seminarians and of high school and college students who are considering the ministry as a profession show that these young men and women have distinct images of what an ideal priest, minister, or rabbi should be. Seminarians tend to give expression to this image not only in words but also by their behavior. One observer of seminary life (Kleinman 1984), whose doctoral research was based on a half year's residence in a Protestant theological school, found striking differences between divinity school students and those in schools of

medicine and nursing, especially in the ways they "modelled" the behavior of their future professions.

Students in the health sciences were often more concerned with "psyching out" their teachers, "fronting",[1] and "making the grade" than were those preparing for ministry. Those in medicine and nursing often took on a "cloak of professionalism," learning to appear as experts to their teachers even when they were not. In contrast, Protestant seminary students adopted a "front" that downplayed both displays of competence and the distance that professionals ordinarily maintain between themselves and their clients. Seminarians were more ready to give public expression to the kind of personal feelings and aspirations that health professionals generally kept private.

> Given an ideology that comes close to being anti-professional, [seminary] students are not preoccupied with displaying competence. In the seminary, students are deemed fit for the professional role to the extent that they show *role distance* from a concern with competence or performance. Students do care about whether they will become good ministers, but in this seminary this is less a matter of displaying one's skills and knowledge than in being the "right kind of person." They show they are the right kind of people by displaying their individuality, spontaneity, and "gut feelings" rather than technical skills. (Kleinman 1984: 104)

We have fairly strong evidence that this "anti-professional" front is not just an effect of seminary training but exists prior to a student's entering seminary. In the Fall of 1990, a group of 520 young United Methodists in their late high school or early college years attended a church-sponsored meeting on religious professions entitled: "Exploration '90: Is God Calling You?" Of this group, 279 said they were "definitely certain" or "fairly definite" about becoming a minister. The survey questionnaire[2] they completed included a set of questions that were identical to those asked by Alexander Astin in his 1990 annual college freshman survey (Astin, Korn and Berz 1991: 1). When asked whether "becoming a known authority in my career field" was of "importance to you personally", 68 percent of the Astin freshman sample responded that this goal was either "essential" or "very important." (The other two options were "somewhat important" and "not important.") In contrast, only 28 percent of the United Methodist students who were at least fairly certain of becoming ministers answered that becoming a known authority in one's chosen field was essential or very important. Even more striking was the difference in response rates to the item "being very well off financially" as a career goal. In the Astin sample, 74 percent of college freshmen named that as an essential or very important goal, while only 11 percent of the United Methodists' "definites" did so.

The young Methodists who were surveyed at "Exploration '90" were clearly not in step with the cultural trends that Astin has demonstrated in his annual survey of American college freshmen. For the two decades after the beginning of the Vietnam War, male college freshmen expressed, with ever increasing intensity, an interest in money, power, and status as life goals (Dey, Astin, Korn and Riggs 1992: 5). Figure 2 records the responses each year of some 200,000 American women and men just entering college. The men were far more likely than the women (with the differences ranging from 9 to 20 percentage points over the two decades) to endorse "being well-off financially" as an essential or very important life goal; and they were correspondingly less likely to affirm that one of their goals was to "develop a meaningful philosophy of life." The decline in male candidates for ordination mentioned earlier may have been one of the effects of this general cultural trend.

[1] Erving Goffman defined a "front" as the way we ordinarily present ourselves to one of our regular "audiences," e.g., a teacher to his class, a nurse to a patient (Goffman 1959: 22).

[2] The survey instrument was designed by James Oman of the United Methodist Church's Division of Ministry and Ronald Flaugher of Educational Testing Service.

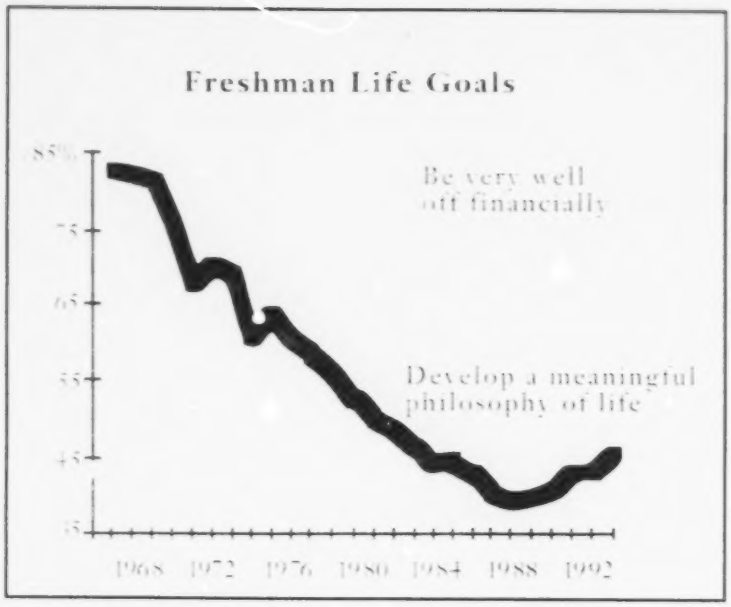

Figure 2 Source: Graduate School of Education, University of California at Los Angeles

In 1987, Astin reported that, for the first time in decades, the long-term trend toward increasing materialism among male collegians began to turn. Each year since 1987, student commitment to financial well-being has dropped an average of a half percentage point a year, and interest in a meaningful philosophy of life has advanced in much the same measure. Though it would be difficult to prove that these cultural trends have an effect on enrollments, in the last two years business schools have begun to lose students. It is not yet clear whether seminaries have begun to gain them.

The problematic side of the seminarians' anti-authority "front" is that the clergy, no matter what the theology of the denomination, hold a socially "sacral" position in which it is impossible to escape the exercise of authority. Whether it is the congregation in the pews or a person seeking counseling, each make a grant of authority to the preacher or pastoral counsellor. This bond of inequality between clergy and laity is, as Kleinman points out, clearly something the seminarians she studied had difficulty in accepting. Indeed, they tended to consider the laity's views as valid and as equally authoritative as their own (1984:103). Aside from any theology of ministry, erasing the "distance" between clergy and laity may lead to role confusion. For example, in a recent Episcopal Church survey of lay parish leaders who had recently engaged in a search for a new rector, the research consultant found many lay people curiously ambivalent about whether a priest was really needed for anything more than rite and ritual:

> Parishes were almost in total consensus that the vacancy period gives rise to new, energized lay leadership. However, there was significant concern about the way this leadership is dissipated when the new priest arrives. A very large number of parishes admitted that they questioned for what a priest was needed, except the sacramental/liturgical life of the parish. (Smith 1990:31)

The Methodist "Exploration '90" survey mentioned earlier also included a section that asked students to describe how they imagined the working life of a minister. The following is a composite of their responses:

- Roughly three-quarters of the students agreed that ministers were widely admired, influential, and respected members of the community, though a third felt that, in 1990, clergy were not as good as they used to be.
- While 85 percent felt that ministers were on call all the time, were overworked, and had no private life, there was overwhelming agreement that the clergy enjoyed their lives despite being underpaid.
- About half the students felt that people had unrealistic expectations about what clergy could accomplish professionally, and an even higher percentage of students felt that ministers were held to unreasonable standards in their private lives.

As these students perceived, clergy exercise authority both by reason of their office and because of their personal qualities. The newly ordained pastor of a rural church is accorded a level of responsibility and respect unrelated to personal

accomplishments. Though the laity may have more life experience and, in some denominations, considerable power over the newly ordained's continued employment, they show respect for an institution they revere by according respect to the office that the new priest or minister holds. Over time, the traditional authority that arises from holding an institutional position is confirmed or, in some cases, weakened by the personal qualities the minister exhibits.

DIFFERING ATTITUDES OF MALE AND FEMALE PROTESTANT SEMINARIANS

There is some evidence suggesting that men and women image the role of a priest or minister in different ways and that these images have a practical effect in their career choices. In our surveys of entering seminarians, we asked students to rank the importance of a number of factors in their decision to enter ministry. For all but one item, male and female responses were no more than a few percentage points apart. But when ranking the importance of entering ministry for an "opportunity for study and growth" 80 percent of the women but only 66 percent of the men listed this item as "important" or "very important." As a rule of thumb, we have found that the older a male seminarian is when he begins his studies, the more likely it was that he will see the study of theology as a means to an end whereas women seminarians, no matter what their age when they begin, see the study of theology as an end in itself.

There may, however, be an unexpected side to women's interest in intellectual pursuits. In the anecdotal lore of theological education — and some research confirms it — there runs a thread of argument that says: the more interested you are in theology as a discipline, the less interested you will be in parish ministry. Our surveys show that women enrolled in the ordination track Master of Divinity (M.Div.) programs, no matter what their age or denomination, are consistently less likely than men of the same age and denomination to choose "parish ministry" when presented with a variety of career goals. This gender difference is most evident for women M.Div. candidates under age 30. They are a good deal less likely (16 percent) than their male age peers to list parish ministry as a career goal. Indeed, the women under 30 are far less likely than the older women to choose the parish as the locus of their future work. When compared to the women in other age groups, those under 30 tend to be less involved in the local church, have less contact with clergy, less likely to choose a seminary for its denominational affiliation, and significantly less likely to say they plan to be ordained.

It should be noted that women's relative lack of interest in parish ministry exists prior to their seminary education. Kleinman suggests that women seminarians are put off by the minister's traditional male role.

> The traditional role of the minister fits with the stereotypical male model of behavior. Since ministers are supposed to be authoritative and somewhat authoritarian, personable but not personal, we would expect women entering the field to feel somewhat uncomfortable. (1984: 88)

Our data suggests that women M. Div. candidates, especially the younger ones, are attracted to career options such as pastoral counseling and chaplaincies where small group or face-to-face encounters make up a large portion of the work day. While the male minister stereotype may be off-putting to some women candidates, parish ministry also offers fewer of these one-on-one relationships than other career options. Whatever the reason for their lack of interest in parish work, it is clear that the experience women seminarians have had of parish life before they enter seminary seems to make them less attracted than men are to this form of corporate ministry.

THE IMAGE OF THE RABBI

In Israel at the time when Jesus of Nazareth began his ministry, the term rabbi meant "my teacher" or "my master" and was reserved for those who had a thorough knowledge of Jewish religious tradition (Torah), both in its oral and written forms. Judaism is a faith that centers on orthopraxy — correct practice — rather than orthodoxy[1] — correct belief. In the words of Reform Judaism's 1976 San Francisco platform, *Reform Judaism: A Centenary Perspective:* "Judaism emphases action rather than creed as the primary expression of a religious life" (Meyer 1993:393). Before the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the rabbinate, as a scholarly caste within a strict observance movement known as the Pharisees, shared religious authority with a hereditary caste of priests who offered sacrifice in the Temple. After the Temple was destroyed and the people of Israel dispersed, the hereditary priesthood lost its functions, and the rabbinate and the synagogue survived as the locus of Jewish community worship and study (Gottschalk 1987: 17).

Theologically, a rabbi is not a priest (i.e., an intermediary between God and man) but rather a learned layman — or since 1972, a learned laywoman (Meyer 1993:379) — who performs rites that any worthy Jew could perform (Gottschalk 1987: 4). Since Judaism is a legal order (halachah) based on a complex system of ritual and ethical precepts (mitzvot) that govern one's life from sunrise to sunset and from birth to death, occasions often arise in daily life when one demand of the law may seem to conflict with another (Rosenthal 1978:44). One of the traditional roles of the rabbi was to help observant Jews resolve such conflicts. The image of the rabbi from the Diaspora to the 20th century was that of a Torah scholar, deeply learned in the law. In earlier times, a rabbi would not have thought of himself as a "pastor" in the Christian tradition, one who visits one's congregants in an attempt to know them and their personal needs. He was a scholar and teacher with few if any peripheral functions. It would not be far wrong to say that the traditional function of the rabbi and that of the Christian minister or priest represented two different professions.

By the beginning of this century, however, the image of the rabbi in the Reform and Conservative movements began to take on pastoral overtones. In 1890, the first annual Convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Reform), initiated an uneasy and halting transition from the rabbi defined exclusively as scholar to the rabbi who was a pastor as well. As American Judaism has evolved in this century, each of the major traditions — Orthodox, Conservative and Reform — have adopted differing positions about the level of obligation that each type of mitzvot, especially those of a ritual nature, actually impose upon a believer. Orthodox Judaism holds the Law to be binding and immutable; Conservative Judaism views it as binding but mutable, evolving with the religious consciousness of the community; while Reform Judaism considers the Law nonbinding and adaptable to contemporary conditions. As a consequence, in the Reform and Conservative movements, the rabbi's traditional role as a solver of difficult cases has been diminished, and his knowledge of the law is less crucial to his authority than his ability to play a leadership role in community life and worship.

The more pastoral a rabbi's role becomes, the more he or she is expected to have personal qualities and skills that go beyond sheer intellectual ability. Though the selection criteria for admission to a Jewish seminary are still much more heavily weighted toward intellectual ability than is generally true for their Christian counterparts, we have some reason to believe that as the importance of the pastoral role increases, intellectual ability is losing its former dominance in the selection process. When we examined the mean verbal scores of 1,131 Jewish seminary applicants who took the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) between

[1] Many Orthodox Jews prefer to be called "Torah-true" rather than "orthodox".

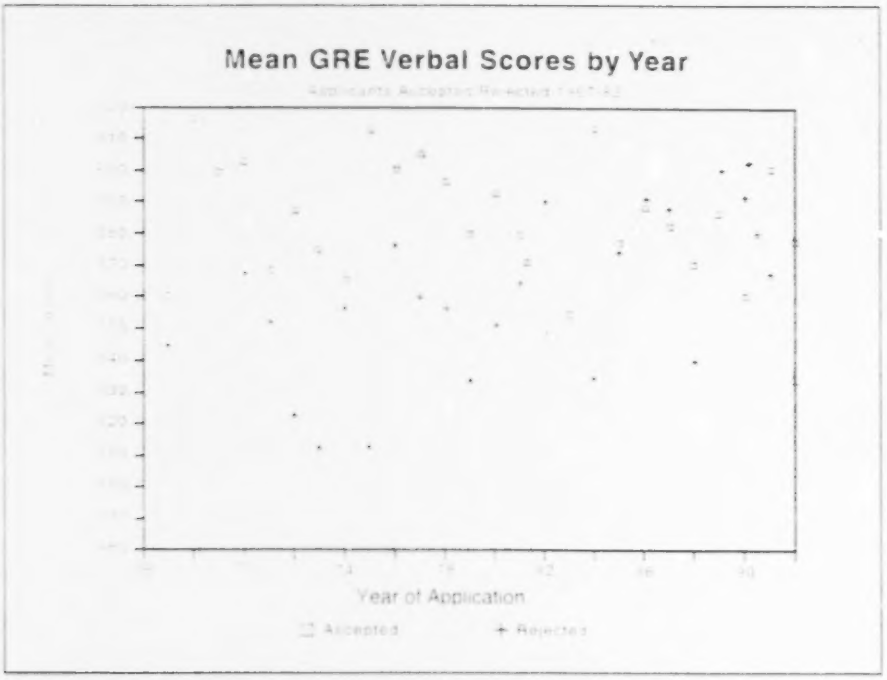

Figure 3: Mean verbal GRE scores for 1,131 Jewish seminary applicants.
Source: ETS Retrospective Database

1967 and 1992, we found, as figure 3 shows, that these scores were reliable admissions predictors only until 1981. After that, the GRE's role in admissions decisions became a good deal less clear. In fact, in five of the 10 years between 1982-1991, the mean GRE verbal score was higher for those rejected than for those accepted.

As the rabbi's role evolves from a scholar of the law to community leader, the same conflicts and role confusion that are apparent in some Christian denominations are likely to appear in the more liberal movements of American Judaism. In American Jewish organizations, lay leaders play a far more prominent role than they do in comparable Christian ones. Though written more than 60 years ago, the following lament of a rabbi in 1929 was echoed more recently by a seminary director of admissions who said that only once in his five-year tenure had a candidate mentioned that his parents were delighted to see him enter the rabbinate.

> The rabbi's advice is rarely listened to in the councils of the congregation. . . . His views are not sought by lay leaders of Jewish education and philanthropy. When I tried to persuade the promising sons of wealthy traditional Jews to enter the Jewish ministry, I was rewarded for my efforts with polite scorn. The parents, remembering how they regarded and treated their own rabbi, resented the suggestion that their sons voluntarily condemn themselves to lifelong martyrdom. (Karp 1985: 129)

Despite these gloomy assessments, interest in the rabbinate has been growing in the past decade. The number of applications to Reform and Conservative Jewish seminaries in some recent years has doubled from the average levels during the 1970s. However, these seminaries remain highly selective, turning down from a third to a half of those who apply. In the future, it may be the supply of positions rather than the supply of graduates that will be a source of concern in the Jewish community.

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CATHOLIC STUDENTS' IMAGES OF A PRIEST

If Protestant seminarians show some signs of a flight from authority, Catholic men interested in the priesthood seem attracted to authority roles. In a 1985 survey of some 600 Catholic undergraduates in 33 colleges, Dean Hoge, a sociologist at the Catholic University of America, found that male college students who showed an interest in the priesthood were more likely than other Catholic collegians to stress the Church's authority to set strict standards of doctrinal belief and favor a way of life for Catholics that would be distinct from prevailing American lifestyles.

> They believe, more than other students, that the fact that leadership in the Catholic Church is held by celibate men is a strength, not a weakness. They are less interested than other students in having the church put more emphasis on aiding poor and hungry human beings, as opposed to putting more emphasis on counseling or spiritual guidance of members. They are less in favor of having women priests in the future. . . . and the distance between their views and the views of the women [students] is sometimes great. (Hoge 1987: 128)

In Hoge's survey, the Catholic women who would be interested in the priesthood if it were open to them showed strikingly different attitudes toward the status quo. They put less emphasis on clergy-laity status differences and insisted less on strict standards of doctrinal belief, especially concerning divorce and birth control. They saw the church's male celibate leadership as more a weakness than a strength and were more likely to favor the ordination of married men. Such differing perceptions between men and women may cause conflicts that carry over into the Church's institutional life. According to a recent study of women in religious orders, more than 40 percent of the nuns surveyed said they found it difficult to work with male clergy (Schuth 1993: 7).

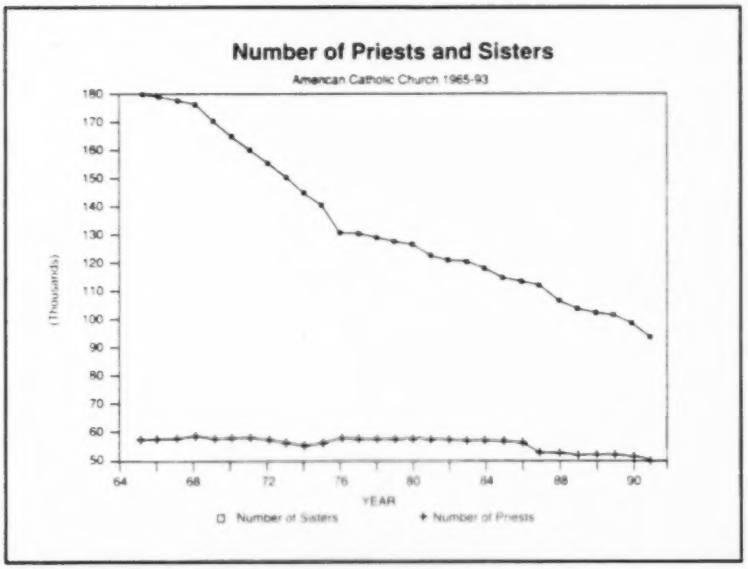

Figure 4 Source: Official Catholic Directory

For Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians, the shortfall in male candidates has been more than compensated for by the ordination of women. Though the Catholic Church does not ordain women, it has traditionally provided the religious orders of women a wide scope in the conduct of schools, colleges and hospitals. In the 19th and early 20th centuries when it was rare to find women in executive positions, Catholic nuns were, as a matter of course, college presidents, heads of hospitals, and directors of major social service agencies. From the middle of the 19th century until the mid-1960s, the number of women in religious orders was roughly three times that of priests and brothers. In 1967, as figure 4 shows, when the number of priests reached its all-time peak of 59,892, there were 176,671 nuns. Twenty-five years later, the American Catholic Church had 80,000 fewer nuns and 10,000 fewer priests.

Another noteworthy change in the American Catholic situation today is the unprecedented lack of interest among young Catholic women in religious professions. In 1961, a leading Jesuit sociologist reported: "It is said that every young girl in the parochial school 'thinks about' becoming a nun some time or other" (Fichter 1961:15). Today the Catholic Church finds that barely 10 percent of young Catholic women show any interest in a religious vocation. Indeed, they are

Think about being a sister, brother, or a priest	Gender				Total Cases	
	Male		Female			
Never	4,754	58.5%	5,545	71.1%	10,299	64.6%
Seldom	1,950	24.0%	1,514	19.4%	3,464	21.7%
Sometimes	946	11.6%	541	6.9%	1,487	9.3%
Often	356	4.4%	146	1.9%	502	3.2%
Always/Regularly	127	1.6%	55	.7%	182	1.1%
Total Cases	8,133	100%	7,801	100%	15,934	100%

Figure 5 Source: National Catholic Educational Association database

only half as interested in religious professions as young Catholic men. Figure 5 lists the answers given between 1988 to 1991 by almost 16,000 Catholic high school juniors and seniors to the question: ["How often do you] think about becoming a sister, brother, or priest?" (NCEA 1989: 13).

Given the declining number of candidates for the priesthood and religious life, the attitudes of the 13.6 percent of young Catholics (2,171 out of 15,934) who said that they *sometimes*, *often*, or *regularly* thought about becoming a sister, brother, or a priest are particularly interesting. As might be expected, the more often students thought about a religious profession, the more frequently they were likely to say grace before meals, attend Mass and go to confession, be more orthodox in their attitudes toward abortion and sexual morality, work on household chores, spend evenings out with their families, talk about religion with their parents, and visit the sick or help those in need.

A similar proportion of men attending New York Jesuit schools and colleges, about 15 percent, said they had seriously considered the life of a priest or brother, but had decided against it. About 5 percent said they were still considering the idea (Gillespie and King 1989: 14). A major common theme in both the Jesuit and NCEA surveys is that students who actively consider a religious profession have much tighter linkages with their families than do students who express little interest in such a vocation. As a result, their opinions about religion are more likely to reflect family rather than peer attitudes.

This lack of interest in a religious profession among Catholic women high school students may be part of a changing attitude toward the priesthood and religious life among Catholic women in general. In a recent survey of attitudes toward the importance of ordained leadership, Catholic women were less concerned than Catholic men about having ordained priests carry out certain tasks:

> They [women] had less of a preference than Catholic men that priests lead pastoral prayers and teach confirmation classes or new member classes. If a full-time priest could not be obtained, the Catholic women were disproportionately open to non-ordained parish leadership. (Hoge, Carroll and Scheets 1988:107)

This lack of interest in a religious profession does not mean, however, that young Catholic women are becoming irreligious. According to these same NCEA data, young women who seldom or never think of becoming a nun attended Mass just as frequently, and received the Eucharist even more frequently, than those who did think about a religious profession.

SEMINARIANS' IMAGES OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIEST

The Council of Trent (1545-63) described a Catholic priest as one who is to manifest a personal spirituality and a code of clerical behavior that sets him apart from the unordained (White 1989: 13). This image of a priest as a man apart was somewhat softened at the Second Vatican Council with its emphasis on collaboration with the laity in the ongoing work of the Church. As a result, Catholic seminarians tend to have two diverging "fronts": (a) the traditional Tridentine image of the priest as one set apart from the laity by the vow of celibacy and whose function it is to maintain the authority and institutions of the Church; and (b) a more communal, post-Vatican II image of a priest as the spiritual leader of, but not set apart from, a local Catholic community as the People of God (Hemrick and Hoge 1989: 23-29). Catholic seminarians who think in communal terms tend to present a "front" that is more congregational than hierarchial. Celibacy and the ecclesial structures of authority are less positively asserted among those who hold a communal image than they are among those seminarians whose "front" is more reflective of the Church's authority structure.

Among the latter group there is a high degree of agreement that the priest's role includes: "preserving the ecclesial and social structure of the church. . ."; "being an extension of the bishop. . ."; ". . .performing liturgical rites which are exclusive to the priesthood"; and ". . . spiritual governance of the laity." One suspects that seminarians whose image of a priest is that of an authority figure set apart from the laity by the vow of celibacy are more likely to engage in the kind of "professional fronting" that is common among medical and nursing students. These two images of priesthood may be a future source of conflict in the Church since the communal image, which has many elements in common with the Methodist image above, tends to be held more often by religious order priests whereas the institutional image is more dominant among the diocesan clergy.

This image of a communal versus an institutional priesthood may also be reflected in the attitudes of Catholic high school and college students. When the New York Jesuits asked their students: "What terms or images come to your mind when you hear the word 'Church' used," more than half gave institutional images: "clergy, priests, nuns, Rome" or the characteristics of buildings where people worship. Only a quarter used such terms as: "a caring people, family, kindness, community, service of the less fortunate" (Gillespie and King 1989: Appendix B). These images of Church and priesthood, on the part of both seminarians and other Catholic students, suggest that the ecclesiology of the Counter-Reformation may still hold sway.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DILEMMA

The Roman Catholic Church is the only major American denomination that projects a significant shortage — as opposed to an age imbalance — of clergy within the first decade of the next century. In 1960, the ratio of priests, both active and retired, to parishioners in the American Catholic Church was one priest for every 759 Catholics; that ratio has now (1993) decreased to one priest for every 1,163 Catholics. The total number of American Catholic priests peaked in 1967 at 59,892 and declined over the following decades to 50,907 in 1993. The slipping priest-to-parishioner ratio is due, in great part, to three factors: the rapid increase of the Hispanic Catholic population through immigration from Latin America, resignations from the priesthood, and a falloff in the number of ordinations.

In the years since 1960, the American Catholic population has grown from 42 million to 59 million. Maintaining the 1960 priest-to-parishioner ratio for today's American Catholic population would require approximately 75,000 priests. Instead, the number of those preparing

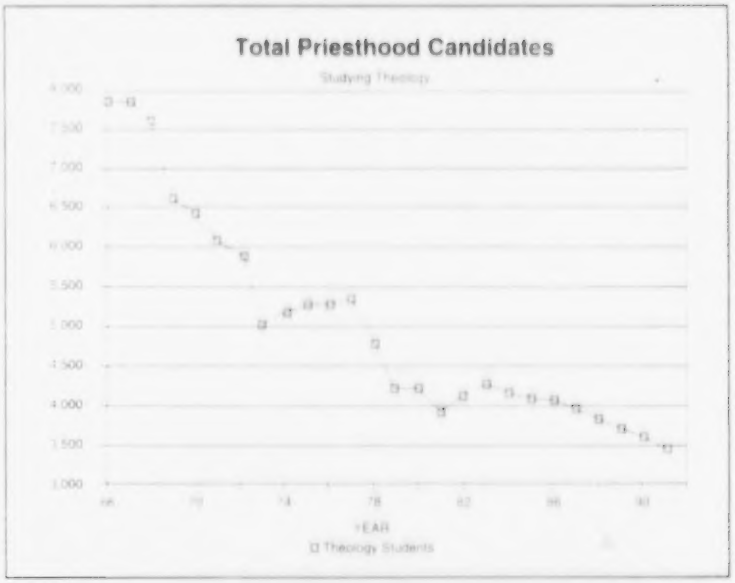

Figure 6 Source: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA)

for the priesthood at all levels has fallen precipitously. As figure 6 shows, between 1966 and 1992, the number of candidates for the priesthood studying theology dropped by more than half from 7,855 to 3,651 (Hemrick and Walsh 1993: 67).

The rule of celibacy is often blamed for this lack of interest in the priesthood. This may well be so. In the Gillespie and King study mentioned earlier, 85 percent of the 1,289 male Catholics attending Jesuit high schools and colleges in the New York area said that "not being allowed to marry" was an important barrier to becoming a priest, but a third would consider the priesthood if allowed to marry (1989: 14).

The Catholic Church, however, is *not*, as we saw earlier, the only mainline denomination to experience a decline in the number of men preparing for ordained ministry. Parallel declines in the number of male candidates in denominations with a married clergy suggest that, while celibacy may be a contributing factor, the falloff in priesthood candidates in the Catholic Church may have causes that are also rooted in more general cultural trends.

SAT TEST-TAKER ATTITUDES TOWARD RELIGION

To monitor these trends, we have examined a number of substantial databases that tell us something about the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of teenage American Catholics. By far the largest regular collection of information about the attitudes of high school students is the College Board's Admissions Testing Program, more commonly known as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). When students register to take the SAT, they are required to indicate their gender, birth date, and high school attended. In addition, more than 80 percent of test takers complete an optional background questionnaire called the Student Descriptive Questionnaire (SDQ). The SDQ inquires about their academic achievements, their extracurricular interests — sports, theater, debating — and, even more important for this study, their religious tradition or denomination.

No matter what their religious tradition, students who said they "participated in a religious activity or organization" in high school differed from those who did not participate in that, *on average*, their parents were better educated and had higher incomes; their scores were higher than three-quarters of the SAT population as a whole; and they were more likely to have taken honors courses and to have aspired to advanced degrees (Grandy 1993:7). Figure 7 shows the degree to which those who participated in religious organizations or activities in high school differed from those who did not participate.

Students who participated in religious activities were also more likely to be involved in community service programs and, with the exception of athletics, most school-sponsored extracurricular activities. They also tended to list humanities, social sciences, health sciences, and education as desired college majors more frequently

Characteristics of Religious Activity Participants and Nonparticipants		
	Participated (N= 295,335)	Did not Participate (N= 798,498)
Mother had at least 4 years of college	39%	29%
Father had at least 4 years of college	51%	40%
Annual family income at least $40,000	52%	46%
Taking honors courses	49%	35%
Seeking master's as highest degree	30%	26%
Seeking doctorate as highest degree	23%	17%
Mean verbal SAT score	448	414
Mean quantitative SAT score	497	468

Figure 7 Source: Educational Testing Service

and chose business less often than did those students who did not participate in religious activities.

Of the more than 1 million high school students who took the SAT in 1990, 288,088 (26 percent of the SAT population) identified themselves as Roman Catholics. Like other SAT-takers, nearly all of these young Catholics planned to attend a four-year college or university. They represented, in other words, the more academically able among their peers and can not be considered representative of the entire group of high-school age Catholics. When these young Catholic men and women were asked whether: a) they had participated in a religious organization or activity in high school; and b) whether they planned to participate in a religious organization or activity in college, they were somewhat less likely than Protestant and Jewish students to answer "yes" to either question.

Figure 8 illustrates the percentages by denomination of those who answered that (a) they "participated in a religious activity or organization in 11th grade" and (b) they "plan to participate in a religious activity or organization in college."

Religious Participation Rates by Denomination		
	11th Grade	College
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	23.5%	11.1%
Roman Catholic	28.6	12.1
Unitarian Universalist Churches	33.7	10.7
Eastern Orthodox Churches	34.7	10.3
Jewish	35.4	22.7
Methodist	37.9	23.8
Lutheran	39.3	18.2
United Church of Christ	39.8	12.8
Presbyterian	41.8	25.1
Pentecostal	44.3	31.6
Church of the Brethren	47.3	28.2
Assemblies of God	51.8	39.7
Church of the Nazarene	54.8	39.9
Southern Baptist	63.2	49.4
Mennonite	67.4	44.8
Mormon	69.4	52.1

Figure 8 Source: Educational Testing Service

Figure 9 below plots the percentages of each denomination's high school participation rate in religious activities on the horizontal axis and planned college participation rate on the vertical axis. Each square box represents the intersection of those two participation rates. Keep in mind while reading the chart that the higher the box is on the chart, the greater the *college* participation rate. The farther to the right the box is on the chart, the greater the *high school* participation rate.

Compare, for example, the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox boxes. The Eastern Orthodox have a greater participation rate than Roman Catholics for high school but a lesser one for college — that is, they are much further to the right than the Roman Catholic box but lower. Similar comparisons can be made between the Assemblies of God and the Church of the Nazarene. The Nazarenes have a greater high school participation rate — they are farther to the right — than the Assemblies

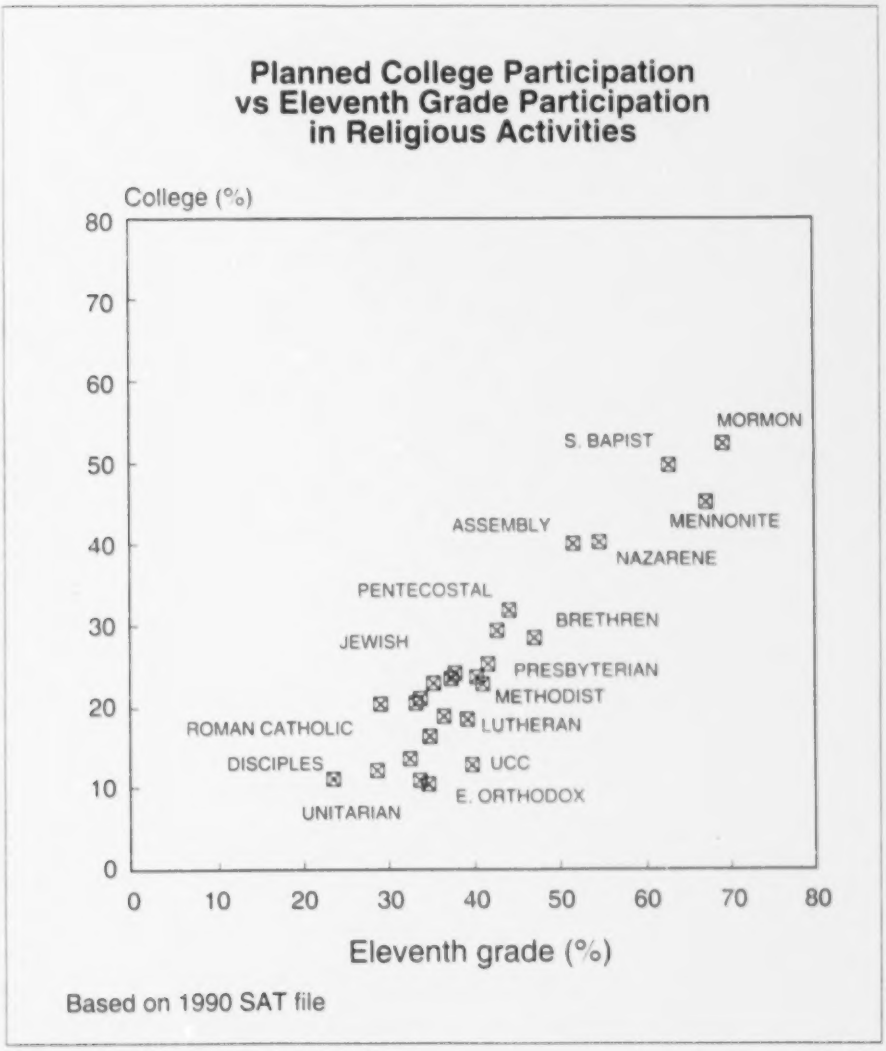

Figure 9 Source: Educational Testing Service

of God, but both have an equal college rate with their boxes at the same height.

Our findings confirm other research that liberal Protestants, Catholics, and Jews suffer much greater losses in participation among youths and young adults than do conservative Protestant denominations (Roof and McKinney 1987: 171). More than 60 percent of the students who described themselves as Mormons, Southern Baptists, and Mennonites reported that they participated in a religious organization in high school. The denominations reporting the lowest participation rates were Disciples of Christ, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox Churches, and Unitarians. It would not be unreasonable to say that this chart provides a rough report card on a denomination's effectiveness with its teenage members who plan to go to college.

The term "participation in a religious activity or organization" is admittedly fuzzy. Some students may have interpreted it loosely to mean "going to church or synagogue." Others may have restricted the meaning to active participation in church-sponsored youth groups. Even here the meaning may have been blurred. Some young people who played in a church basketball league may have counted that as a religious activity while it might not have occurred to young Catholics attending a Catholic high school to think of basketball as a religious activity.

These caveats are serious enough for us to question the validity of the SAT data about Catholic students attending Catholic high schools. We suspect that these students systematically underreported their involvement in religious activities. The same caveats, however, do not apply to young Catholics who attended public high schools. Their reported rates of current and planned participation in religious activities were significantly lower than those of young Methodists, Presbyterians, and Lutherans who also attended public high schools. Figure 10 on the following page consolidates the SAT statistics for Roman Catholic students in both public and Catholic high schools into four sets of comparisons by level of participation and type of school attended.

Figure 10 confirms the findings described earlier, but with an occasional unexpected twist:

- The first set of comparisons at the top of the chart compares Catholics SAT-takers in both public and parochial high schools. Catholics attending public high schools were significantly less likely to participate in religious and community activities, less likely to say they planned to participate in these activities in college, and less interested in attending a church-related college than Catholics in Catholic high schools.
- The second set of rows compares those who *did* participate in religious activities while in high school. We were surprised to find that public high school "participators" were significantly more likely than Catholic high school "participators" to say they planned to participate in a religious activity while in college.
- The third set of comparisons is of *nonparticipators* at both types of schools. Nonparticipators, no matter what type of school they attended, were almost equally unlikely to say that they planned participate in religious activities in college.
- The final set of comparisons at the bottom of the chart confirm that those who were religiously active in high school and planned to be so in college had significantly higher SAT scores and levels of community service than either nonparticipators or those who participated only in high school, no matter whether they attended a public or parochial high school.

ROMAN CATHOLIC SAT EXAMINEES 1989-1990							
High School Background	**Number (%white)**	**Average Verbal Score**	**Average Math Score**	**% H.S. Religious Activity**	**% Plan College Religious Participation**	**% H.S. Community Activity**	**% Interested in Church-related College**
Attended Catholic H.S.	(78%) 78,106	439	475	33%	13.4%	42%	31%
Attended Public H.S.	(76%) 191,051	419	474	26%	11.7%	29%	14%
Catholic H.S. who Participated in Rel. Activity	(77%) 26,270	455	491	100%	28%	53%	40%
Public H.S. who Participated in Rel. Activity	(80%) 51,266	446	502	100%	32%	54%	24%
Catholic H.S. Nonparticipants in High School	(78%) 51,836	431	467	0%	5.6%	31%	27%
Public H.S. Nonparticipants in High School	(75%) 139,785	409	464	0%	4.2%	20%	11%
Catholic H.S. Participants in Both HS & Coll.	(76%) 7,563	478	512	100%	100%	74%	57%
Public H.S. Participants Both HS & Coll.	(78%) 16,429	467	522	100%	100%	63%	37%

Figure 10 Source: Educational Testing Service

ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN CATHOLIC PARTICIPATION RATES

In studying Catholic SAT-takers attending *Catholic* high schools, we subdivided the sample by ethnicity to see if any particular group differed from others in religious activity, community service, or planned participation in college. Figure 11 shows that the percentage differences between ethnic groups is small. Asian-American Catholics enrolled in Catholic high schools had the highest participation rates. However, if the participation rates for White Americans — by far the largest group — are used as a norm, only the interest in a church-related college has some level of significance.

Of all the findings from the SAT background questionnaire, perhaps the most consequential is that, among major denominations, the Catholic Church ranks next to last in its impact on members who attend public high schools. This finding may have a bearing on an ongoing debate among Catholic educators about the century-old strategy of concentrating the Church's educational resources on children under the age of 14. The history of this commitment is a heroic one of impoverished immigrants determined to protect the faith of their children. But its future is in question.

Catholic Participation Rates by Ethnicity

	White	American Indian	Asian	Black	Mexican American	Puerto Rican	Other Hispanic
Number	60,773	571	3,879	2,347	2,842	2,304	4,015
Religious activity grade 11	33%	35%	37%	30%	36%	32%	34%
Community service activity grade 11	42%	38%	49%	40%	45%	35%	42%
Plan religious participation in college	13%	10%	16%	10%	16%	11%	15%
Plan community service in college	33%	28%	42%	32%	40%	31%	37%
Considering religiously affiliated college	32%	23%	33%	23%	29%	25%	26%

Figure 11 Source: Educational Testing Service

ROLE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

In 1884, the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore made a fateful bargain with the future. To protect the faith of Catholic immigrant families from an aggressive Protestant ethos in the public schools (Dolan 1992:266), the Council decreed that every Catholic parish should have its own school within two years after the Council's close (*Decreta Consilii Plerarii Baltimorensis Tertii* 1884: 104). Though this ideal was never entirely achieved, by 1959 just short of 60 percent of the nation's Catholic parishes had schools, and they enrolled about half of the Catholic children of elementary school age (Dolan 1992: 397). One of the unexplored consequences of the Council's decision was that the economies of scale of a *school*, rather than some other pastoral consideration, would for the next century dictate parish size. Catholic parishes had to have enough families with children to support a school; and to achieve an economically viable school, the Church was required to cluster its diocesan clergy into fewer but larger parishes than was customary in Protestant denominations. In 1960, for example, the average Catholic parish had 2,400 members compared to an average of 250 members in Methodist congregations and an average of 450 in Episcopal congregations. Today the average Roman Catholic parish has 3000 members and is roughly five times larger than the average Lutheran congregation and 10 times larger than the average Methodist congregation[8].

In the century that followed the Third Council of Baltimore, the parochial school played the same mentoring role for young Catholics that the local congregation did for young Protestants. The Catholic school, where each day young people had close personal contact with priests and religious sisters, constituted the community of belief in which the young were socialized into the faith of their parents. Though the financing of the parish school required an ample supply of nuns to staff (and subsidize) the enterprise, the schools, as the prime source for recruiting new members into the priesthood and religious life, created their own supply of dedicated teachers for almost a century.

It is not clear, however, that the Church calculated the risks of this strategy. On one side there was the danger that Catholic children in public schools would become second-class citizens in their own parishes (Fichter 1961:41). And on the other, some parishes put so many of their eggs into the parochial school basket that they became, perforce, child-centered institutions, unable to provide an adequate level of pastoral care to other age groups. As long as the Council of Baltimore's strategy for religious socialization continued to create a supply of priests and dedicated members of religious orders, especially the women's orders, a school-centered parish could continue as a self-perpetuating system. But when the supply of nuns practically disappeared, a school tended to become a financial liability. Many parishes found themselves with neither a school nor a rich organizational life beyond the school to support their mission. One of the major dilemmas in American Catholic life today is to find alternatives to the parochial school as an effective vehicle for the education and moral formation of the young.

[8]The average size for Catholic parishes was derived by dividing the number of American Catholics by the number of parishes tha serve them. However, comparisons between denominations are open to serious systematic error since denominational criteria for membership differ significantly. The ratios above are meant to be illustrative of magnititudes of difference, not a precise number (Cf. Greeley 1989: 22).

CONCLUSION

In the course of our research, we have seen that the pool from which candidates for religious vocations are likely to be drawn — that is, those who participate in religious activities in high school and college — is not a random sample of high school and college graduates. They are young men and women who appear to be more altruistic, more socially involved, and academically more able than students who do not participate in religious activities. Their attitudes toward financial well-being and worldly success are sharply different from the vast majority of their college-going peers. If Astin's annual survey of college freshmen can be read as a "leading indicator," the future pool of ministry candidates is likely to grow somewhat over the next few years and contain a larger number of men under age 30 than it has in the past decade or two. However, a corresponding increase among women under 30 may be less likely to occur. The entering women seminarians we surveyed were somewhat less likely than men to say that they had considered entering the ministry while in high school or college. College-age women were also less affected by the cultural trends that Astin described and may therefore be less likely to show the kind of "rebound" effect that we might expect to see among men under 30.

In mainline Protestant denominations, most of which allow the ordination of women, the primary pool for new clerical leadership has not been recent college graduates in their 20s but the older lay men and women active in the leadership of local congregations (O'Neill and Murphy, 1991:10). In Reform and Conservative Judaism, interest in the rabbinate has been rising, especially among women. The most likely future problem is the lack of pulpits to accommodate the increase in ordinations. In the Catholic Church, married lay leaders are ineligible for the priesthood and may not progress beyond the status of permanent deacon. The rule of celibacy and the ban on the ordination of women limit the pool of candidates for the Roman Catholic priesthood to a minuscule proportion of unmarried Catholic men who are willing to consider a celibate life style.

However, the future supply of clergy is a doctrinal as well as a demographic issue. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the clergy, no matter what their denomination, combine the roles of priest, prophet, and minister. As priests, they preside at the annual cycle of religious holy days and at the life-cycle events of birth, coming of age, marriage, and death. As prophets, they are the authoritative interpreters of God's covenant with mankind. As ministers, they serve the needs of their religious communities for counsel, example, and advice. Each of these roles has its own source of authority depending on the religious tradition involved — sacrament, consent of the congregation, Scripture, learning, and holiness.

Our surveys show some cognitive dissonance between the young adults' image of ministry and the traditional clergy roles mentioned above. Some Protestant seminarians may feel uncomfortable as authoritative interpreters of Scripture. Some Catholics find it difficult to reconcile the authority conferred by the sacrament of ordination with the authority that comes from the consent of the congregation. Even more of a challenge to the Catholic Church is that young Catholic women are experiencing some significant degree of alienation from the work of the Church, even though they maintain the practice of their religion. If, as Hemrick and Hoge suggest, the Church's diocesan clergy increasingly tend to see themselves as representatives of Church authority, the potential for conflict with their future parishioners, and perhaps with religious order clergy, is a matter of some concern.

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